

My name is Rich Biedrzycki. I am a resident of downtown Bethesda and a member of Strong Towns DC, a local conversation whose goal is to see that Washington and the region become more resilient, both economically and as communities.

We are commenting to support the proposed Zoning Text Amendment, ZTA 25-05, Development Standards - Optional Method Public Benefits. With the cost of living crisis the country is facing, it is imperative that we work as a community to bring those costs down. One of the best ways to do that is to build more housing. This amendment simplifies the process of approval for increased development density. By simplifying the process, developers will face reduced costs which will speed up and encourage development.

We support the inclusion of family-sized units as a public benefit category. According to Redfin, the median home price in Montgomery County is \$670,000. This price is out-of-reach for working-class families such as our teachers, firefighters, and social workers. Many of the apartments that have recently been built or are currently being built cap out at two bedrooms. For many families, this is not enough space. By incentivizing developers to build family-sized units with the promise of increased floor-area ratio (FAR), we should hopefully see an increase in the supply of these units, lowering the costs for families.

We also support the inclusion of deeply affordable units as a public benefit category. By encouraging developers to build these units through increased FAR, they will be more likely to include these less profitable units if they can add more profitable market-rate units.

We support the decision to increase the objectivity of the Design Excellence category. This will reduce ambiguity and make things easier for both the county and developers.

While we support these changes overall and wish to see the amendment passed, we believe changes should be made to the amount of FAR allowable by default. Each of the public benefit goals (Housing for All, Environmental Resilience, Infrastructure for Compact Growth, and Complete Communities) would all be more attainable through a less restrictive standard method FAR. By allowing for increased density, we would be able to produce greater levels of housing, increasing the supply and lowering prices. Denser living is also more environmentally friendly due to reduced energy usage and reduction in greenfield development. This increased density would also encourage more public transit usage and mixed-use development due to greater numbers of residents within a given area. Thus, we believe an increase in the standard method FAR as well as an expansion of the Excel-to-Build framework would be greatly beneficial in meeting these goals the county has set.

We would like to thank the council for their work in attempting to simplify the regulatory process for new developments. We would also like to thank the Planning, Housing, and Parks Committee for their work in developing this amendment. We hope to see this amendment passed and that our suggestions are well-received.